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COMMISSION GOVERNMENT IN ILLINOIS CITIES

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The movement for the commission form of municipal government has begun later in Illinois than in some other states of the middle west. But started within the past year, the system has made rapid headway. Following the passage of an optional law by the General Assembly in 1910, about thirty cities and villages have voted on its adoption; and in nearly twenty, commission government has been established. This record places Illinois among the leading states in this movement; and an account of the previous municipal conditions and the special features of the law and its results in this state should be of considerable importance in a general discussion of commission government for cities.

Until the adoption of the third State Constitution in 1870, cities in Illinois were incorporated under special charters; with the usual variety and confusion in forms of organization, and with some notable instances of the abuse of legislative control. By the Constitution of 1870, stringent restrictions were placed on special legislation; and a general law for cities and villages was enacted in 1872, which at the time was perhaps the best law of the kind in the United States, and has been accepted by practically all the cities in the State. This law was based on the then prevailing mayor and council system; but with a more definite division of powers than in most special charters. The mayor nominated and with the consent of the council appointed most of the city officials; and also had an effective power of removal. The council, organized on the usual ward system, had, in addition to the customary enumerated powers, the authority to establish new municipal offices and control over finances.

The cities and villages act, however, did not include the whole body of legislation on municipal government; and one of the striking features of municipal organization in Illinois has been the number of distinct and overlapping public authorities. Cities and villages remain part of the townships within which they are geographically

located; and the township officers continue to be separately elected. Other laws provide for the creation of school, park and drainage districts; and for the election of school, park and drainage boards, whose jurisdiction overlaps that of the city government. The result in most of the more important cities has been a confusing list of elective authorities, and a lack of any effective responsibility in local government.

Numerous amendments have also been added to the original cities and villages act, some of which may be noted. An act of 1895 authorized the establishment of the merit system in the municipal service; and this act has been adopted in Chicago, Springfield and Rockford. Several cities have adopted an act of 1903, authorizing the establishment of boards of fire and police commissioners. Moreover, the recent legislation on primary elections introduced the system of direct nominations for municipal elections, but did this in connection with the regular party system and made it more difficult than before to conduct municipal campaigns by local parties or on an independent basis.

Under these conditions municipal affairs in Illinois cities have apparently been managed about as in the other states, ranging from a fair degree of efficiency to some pronounced instances of mismanagement and corruption. Chicago stands in a class by itself; and, as it is not affected by the movement for commission government, it will be omitted from this paper. But a brief statement of conditions reported from a few other cities will serve to indicate the general situation.

Springfield, during the past decade, has had a steady and notable gain in material prosperity, the population having increased over fifty per cent from 1900 to 1910, to 51,678 inhabitants in the latter year. At the same time the city government was considered to be inefficient and extravagant, controlled by public service corporations and conducted on a "wide open" policy. In July, 1908, the city council extended the street railway franchise without a popular referendum, which had been demanded on a public policy vote the year before. In August of the same year, occurred the race riot, due in part at least to municipal inefficiency. In April, 1909, John S. Schnepf was elected mayor; and under his lead the municipal government was placed on a high level of efficiency and economy, on the executive and administrative side.

But the council was politically opposed to the mayor, and proved a serious obstacle to the work of bettering conditions.

In Moline, the aldermen seemed to be under the control of the mayor, and municipal affairs were run in a slipshod manner. Franchises were granted without compensation, saloons were open on Sundays and nights, and grafting was openly charged. In Decatur, municipal elections had been determined largely on the basis of national parties and national issues; the local affairs were in the hands of inefficient men; responsibility could not be located. The last city council was divided eight to six, the mayor standing with the six. The result was a deadlock; and what little was accomplished was by compromise and trading.

On the other hand, in Elgin, where commission government has now been adopted, it is reported that there was no general dissatisfaction with the council or the work it was doing. And Bloomington, where the proposition to adopt the commission plan was defeated, is said to have been favored with good business administrations for several years.

Active steps to secure an act of the legislature authorizing the commission plan of municipal government in Illinois, appear to have begun during the winter of 1908-09. In Springfield, a series of public lectures on the commission plan was given during November and December, 1908, followed by a mass meeting which appointed a committee to draft a bill. Meanwhile, similar steps had been taken in other cities; and at a joint meeting of several local committees, held at Springfield, an agreement was reached as to a bill to be introduced in the General Assembly of 1909. The bill was introduced in the State Senate, by Senator R. J. Barr, of Joliet. A Senate committee was appointed, which visited Galveston, Houston and Dallas, Texas, and submitted a report pointing out the salient features in the charters of these cities and the improvement in their municipal affairs under the commission plan of government. Senator Barr's bill passed the Senate at the regular session; but in the House was referred to the Committee on Municipal Affairs, which failed to make a report. At a special session of the General Assembly, begun in December, 1909, Governor Deneen included the subject of the commission form of municipal government in the call; and during this session an act authorizing the adoption of the commission plan of municipal government was

finally passed. In the law as passed, some amendments were made from the bill as first introduced.

The Illinois law providing for the commission form of municipal government is an amendment adding a new article to the cities and villages act, which may be adopted by any city or village in the state not exceeding 200,000 population. On petition to the county judge by the electors of any city or village, equal to one-tenth of the votes cast for mayor at the last preceding election, it is the duty of such judge to submit the proposition at a special election to be called within sixty days; and at this election, a majority of the votes cast determines the result.

In its specific provisions, the Illinois law follows in the main the Iowa law; but with some important differences. The system of ward aldermen and the distinct powers of the mayor and the council are abolished, and the general authority and responsibility for the municipal government is entrusted to a council, consisting of a mayor and four commissioners elected at large. Nominations for these offices are made at a non-partisan direct primary, at which a double list of candidates are selected, and from these the final elections are made, also without reference to party. Some restrictions are placed on corrupting electoral methods, by providing penalties for bribing, treating, and the agreement to perform campaign services for money or other valuable thing, or for appointments to municipal office or employment.

The executive and administrative work in cities adopting the commission plan is divided among the five departments, each assigned to one of the commissioners, as follows:

- The mayor, in charge of the department of public affairs,
- The department of accounts and finances,
- The department of public health and safety,
- The department of streets and public improvements,
- The department of public property.

The council elects a city clerk, city attorney and treasurer (elective offices under the general law) and other municipal officers, such as corporation counsel, comptroller, chief of police, chief of fire department and library trustees; and also has power to create, fill and discontinue other offices and employment in the city service. The mayor and commissioners may receive annual salaries, varying with the size of the city or village, as follows:

Population	Mayor	Commissioners
Not over 2,000	\$50	\$40
2,000 to 5,000	250	100
5,000 to 10,000	600	400
10,000 to 15,000	1,200	900
15,000 to 20,000	2,000	1,700
20,000 to 30,000	2,500	2,000
30,000 to 40,000	3,500	3,000
40,000 to 60,000	4,000	3,500
60,000 to 80,000	4,500	4,000
80,000 to 100,000	5,000	4,500
100,000 to 200,000	6,000	5,000

In cities of 20,000 and over, the mayor and commissioners shall devote at least six hours daily to the performance of their official duties. A detailed statement of receipts and expenses shall be published monthly; and an annual examination of books and accounts shall be made and published. No mayor, commissioner, officer or employee shall be interested, directly or indirectly, in any contract or job for work or materials or services to be furnished or performed for the city or village.

Provision is also made for the initiative and referendum. All franchises for public service utilities in the public streets or places must be approved by the voters at a general or special election; and every public service corporation is required to furnish equal and uniform service alike to all citizens. A referendum may be demanded on other ordinances passed by the council (except urgency measures passed by a two-thirds vote of the council and when otherwise provided by the laws of the state), on a petition of ten per cent of the votes cast for mayor at the last preceding municipal election. Ordinances may also be proposed by popular initiative; and if not passed by the council shall be submitted to the vote of the electors at the next general municipal election, if the initiative petition is signed by electors equal to not less than ten per cent of the vote for mayor at the preceding municipal election,—and at a special election if the petition is signed by twenty-five per cent of the vote at the preceding election.

The most important differences between the Illinois law and that of Iowa are in regard to the "recall" and the provisions for the merit system. In the Illinois act of 1910 provision is made for the recall of elective officers on a petition signed by at least *seventy-five* per cent of the vote for mayor at the preceding municipi-

pal election, instead of twenty-five per cent as in other laws containing the recall feature. At the legislative session in 1911, this was amended so as to reduce the percentage of signatures for a recall petition to fifty-five per cent; but even this makes the use of the recall so much more difficult than in other places that it is doubtful if it will be called into operation. While the Iowa law provides for a civil service commission and contains some other inadequate provisions for the merit system in appointments in cities adopting commission government, the Illinois law simply provides that in all cities which adopt the civil service act of 1895, municipal officers and employees shall be appointed in accordance with such act. This gives the cities which have adopted that act a much more effective merit system than under the Iowa law; but leaves other cities in Illinois which adopt the commission government law with no special provisions to secure appointments that shall be based on merit and fitness.

The act of 1911, amending the Illinois commission government law, also provides that in cities which have adopted or may adopt the act of 1903, providing for a board of fire and police commissioners, the members of the fire and police departments shall be appointed and discharged in accordance with the provisions of said act. By the amending act of 1911, it is further provided that by ordinance, the commissioner of each department may be vested with authority to appoint and discharge the heads of the principal departments, subordinate to the respective department of which he is commissioner. It should also be noted that in other respects, the Illinois law does not so completely simplify and concentrate all municipal affairs in the hands of the commission as in the laws of other states. While the ward aldermen are abolished, and some of the elective city officials are made appointive, not only the school boards, but also the special park and drainage boards in some cities and the township officials will continue to be separately elected, and to exercise their functions independently of the commission.

During the winter of 1910-11, petitions for a vote on the adoption of the commission government act were prepared in about thirty cities and villages in Illinois, including most of the more important cities. A notable feature of the discussions was the activity of the business men's organizations, such as the boards of trade and chambers of commerce, in favor of the commission plan.

On the other hand, the local politicians and liquor interests in a number of cities were actively opposed to the new system. In Springfield two daily papers supported commission government, one was actively opposed, and one was "on the fence." The result of the elections on the adoption of the commission government act was favorable in about three-fifths of the cities and unfavorable in the remainder. The cities and villages adopting commission government were: Springfield, Decatur, Elgin, Rock Island, Moline, Jacksonville, Ottawa, Waukegan, Pekin, Kewanee, Dixon, Spring Valley, Clinton, Carbondale, Rochelle, Hillsboro, Braceville.

In the following places the new system was defeated: Peoria, Quincy, Joliet, Bloomington, Galesburg, Champaign, Taylorville, Sterling, Whitehall, Sullivan, Savannah, Monmouth.

In most cases the adoption of the commission plan seems to have been due to dissatisfaction with the former condition of municipal affairs. In Elgin, however, a correspondent writes that there was no general dissatisfaction with the personnel of the former government, but that the people believed the commission plan was better and would result in more efficient service. In cities where the new system was defeated, various causes are assigned. In Peoria, the provisions for the initiative, referendum, and recall are said to have been considered by many as dangerous. In Quincy the opposition was well organized and had ample funds. In Bloomington the municipal government seems to have been considered satisfactory, and it was apparently felt that it would be better to wait until other cities had made the experiment before making a change.

Following the adoption of the new system of government came the primaries and elections for the new officials in February and April, 1911. A large number of candidates appeared and a widespread interest in the local campaign was developed in most places. The number of candidates at the primaries in a number of cities is shown below:

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES

City	For Mayor	For Commissioners	Total
Springfield	5	105	110
Decatur	4	64	68
Elgin	6	50	56
Waukegan	6	65	71
Kewanee	4	48	52

Neither at the primaries nor elections were the regular party lines in evidence, although there were some cases of attempts to unite on a slate of candidates. In Springfield, certain candidates were said to have the support of the "Sullivan" democrats and "Lorimer" republicans. In Decatur the issue was "wet" vs. "dry." Attention was concentrated on the qualifications of the individual candidates; and while the number of names on the ballots in some cities was very large, the bulk of the vote was concentrated on a small proportion of names. One correspondent calls attention to the notable absence of carriages, automobiles, and paid workers, alike at the election for adoption, the primary, and the regular election of officials.

The first elections in cities which have adopted the commission plan appear, at least in most cases, to have placed the city government in the hands of a distinctly better class of public officials. In Springfield, Mayor Schnepp was re-elected; and the commissioners include two business men not previously active in politics, the superintendent of waterworks and the city engineer. In Decatur, the "wets" were in the majority, electing the mayor and three commissioners. In Ottawa the new council is said to be very good, although the saloon and vicious elements defeated one or two good candidates. In Elgin the former mayor was re-elected. In Rock Island and Moline the previous administrations were discredited. The lists of commissioners generally include several active business men.

It is as yet too soon to write with any definiteness or finality as to the tangible results of commission government in Illinois cities. In Springfield and some of the other cities, the county treasurer refused to turn over the city funds to the commission, claiming that the commission government act was unconstitutional; and this has caused some delay in placing the new system in working order. A decision in the circuit court, upholding the constitutionality of the law has relieved the situation in these cities; but the question has been carried to the Supreme Court. In some cases the new government has found the city finances in bad condition. In several cities, however, it is possible to point out already decided improvements. In Decatur, the streets are said to be clean, a new lighting system has been installed and a new park has been purchased and opened. In Rock Island and Moline the municipal

officials elected under the commission plan, have forced the county officials to enforce the Sunday closing and other provisions of the dram shop act. In other cities the new officials are said to be working harmoniously, with indications for a more successful and more efficient conduct of municipal affairs.

The officials of the commission governed cities have held several conferences for the discussion of common problems, and have organized an association to continue this policy of co-operation.